

Every Night You Stay by maplemood

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Families of Choice, Fluff, Gen, Little bit of angst, No Plot/Plotless, Season/Series 02, Sharing a Bed, Sleepovers, Sort Of, Spoilers, Steve is now everyone's big brother, Team as Family, but especially Dustin's, or mattress as the case may be

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max Hargrove, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Everyone & Everyone, Jim "Chief" Hopper & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington & Dustin Henderson

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Summary:

It's the weirdest excuse for a sleepover she's ever been involved in.

(Or, after the events of 2x9, Joyce decides that everyone may as well stay the night. It's sort of a mess, but Nancy expected nothing less.)

Every Night You Stay

Author's Note:

Just something quick and messy that I cooked up after burning through season 2 in two days.

It's a wonder—

Okay.

Everything is fine, everything is fine, they'll all be—

Okay.

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It's a wonder that the Byers' house is still standing.

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All the way back from the cabin, Nancy holds his head in her lap.

Not Jonathan's. Jonathan is driving, unsteady, shaking at the wheel, but he keeps them on the road, keeps them moving in the right direction.

True north, Nancy thinks. And past all the shaking and sweat and drying, crusted tears, and underneath all the *fear*—

Never, never.

Things never went back to the way they were.

—She is certain. Certain that Will is going to be all right. Somehow. Some day.

She tells him so.

Will, who's lying with his head pillowed in her lap, doesn't catch it. He only has eyes for Joyce. Ms. Byers clenches both his hands between hers and kisses them, over and over. Every few miles she

reaches out, grabs for Nancy's hands, and kisses them too.

"Thank you," she keeps saying. "Oh sweetheart, thank you."

And Nancy, Will, and Jonathan all smile, clammy and trembling.

Jonathan says, "No problem, Mom."

Nancy wonders how she ever could've believed she wasn't in love with him.

The car rattles over a pothole, rattling her bones with it. She bites her lip, holds herself as still as she can. Smooths Will's sweat-soaked hair.

"You're going to be okay," she whispers again.

Will. I'm sorry I burned you.

We had to hurt you.

We had to.

"I promise."

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There's a demogorgon in the fridge. Shattered glass in the living room. Shattered plates in the kitchen. Blood splattered over the floors.

But the house is still standing.

Really. It's a wonder.

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"Nobody else is going anywhere else tonight," Joyce decides. This is after Hopper and his little girl—El, Eleven, Jane—stumble in last of all. They're both dripping blood; as Joyce hustles them over to the kitchen table Nancy digs another pack of antiseptic wipes out of the first aid kit. She hands them to Mike. No question about that. El looks ready to fall into his arms.

Hopper's going to need more than a couple wipes.

"Hey," he grumbles when Joyce begins to unbutton his shirt. "Not—"

"Dude," Steve interrupts. He's straddling a chair backwards, shirt crumpled on the floor. "If I have to put up with this, so do—watch it, shithead!"

Dustin flinches (only a little). He keeps dabbing at the ugly gash dribbling down Steve's forearm. "You want this to get infected?"

Teetering on the edge or not, Nancy almost laughs—the look that comes over Steve's face is priceless.

"No," he grits out.

"Cause that's what I'm hearing, man. You want this to swell up and start oozing pus—"

"I don't."

"Well I'm not letting it get infected!" Dustin shouts.

Steve's expression shifts. The new one is just as priceless, but for a different reason.

"Don't screw with me," Dustin sniffs, suddenly soft. His eyes gleam wet. "You got that, dipshit?" When Steve reaches out to him he steps back. "Got it?"

"I get it, I get it," Steve says. Even softer. Then Dustin sags, as if all his strings have snapped; he lets Steve reach for him. Even lets him palm the back of his head.

"I get it," Steve repeats one last time. "All right, buddy?"

A lump swells in Nancy's throat.

"Sweetheart?"

All it takes is one tap on the shoulder. She whirls around, choking on said lump.

It's only Joyce.

"Could you help us with the mattresses?"

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Three mattresses, plus multiple pillows, sleeping bags, fuzzy afghans, and sheets.

Here's how it works out: Jonathan and Will take the couch. One at each end, toes to nose. Joyce beds down on the floor next to them. She's out cold in five minutes, her fingers laced through Will's.

El claims the mattress closest to Joyce. Since neither Hopper nor Mike will leave her side, she sleeps sandwiched between the two, and Hopper squashes in arm-to-arm with Joyce. None of them seem to mind.

The single queen mattress almost turns into a battlefield when Steve roars, "Dibs!" and drops down before anyone else can make a move.

"That's not fair!" Max—short-for-Maxine-don't-call-me-Maxine—kicks the mattress.

"She's right, Steve." Nancy can't settle down. If she does the fizzling currently working away in her stomach will rise up her throat until she chokes on it. She paces between the mattresses, to the couch where Jonathan smiles up at her, droop-eyed, already fading away, and back again.

"Yeah, well," Steve won't look at her. "These little shits already gave me one concussion, so."

"I wasn't the one who *broke a plate* over your head!"

Steve winces and props himself up on one elbow. "You were the one driving that goddamn car. So that's a heart attack. Yeah. You kids almost gave me a heart attack, too."

"I got body-slammed against a cabinet!" Lucas pipes up. "I got as much right to sleep on there as you do."

“Ugggh.” Steve buries his swollen face in a pillow. “Respect your elders.”

“Elders?”

Two things happen before it gets ugly. First, Hopper sits up, shirt still unbuttoned over his bandaged side, to quell their noise with the mother of all glowers.

“Don’t make me come over there,” he rumbles.

Second, Dustin charges into the living room. Jostling past Nancy, he kicks off his shoes and, apparently without a thought, flops down next to Steve, who lifts his head enough to say pointedly, “Wow, something reeks.”

“I had to check on it.”

“Again? Kid, you are sick.”

“But it’s a new species!” Dustin protests. “It’s my greatest achievement!”

“Whatever.” Steve sniffs Dustin’s sleeve, coughs. “You smell like demogorgon ass.”

“It’s demodog.”

“Quit kicking me.”

“I’m not kicking you!”

Hopper lurches upright again. “Did I stutter?”

Nancy has to hand it to him—Hopper’s got the kind of voice that could freeze a bear in its tracks. It freezes her when she’s been the quietest of the bunch all evening. Evening; it’s not evening anymore, Jesus, it’s almost morning—

“Huh? Did I?”

“No sir,” Dustin whispers.

“Good. You.”

It takes Nancy a stupidly long minute to realize who he’s talking to.

“Me?”

“Who else? Quit buzzing around and lie down. You’re making me nervous.”

She tries to stop herself. It doesn’t work; Nancy’s eyes wander back to the broken window. Someone (Her? She feels like it might have been her.) duct-taped cardboard over the frame. Best they could do on short notice.

Who feels safe behind cardboard?

“Kid,” Hopper says, exasperated. “You got nothing to worry about.”

“We don’t know that.”

It comes out sharp, almost cutting. She doesn’t care. Nancy Wheeler is nobody’s fool. Hopper might not know her all that well, but by now he should know that.

The police chief drags a hand across his face. He lets out one of those sighs that’s half a bark, then glares at her, mussed and heavy-eyed.

“We don’t,” he agrees. “Nothing more we can do about that tonight though. Clear?”

She glares back.

“Nancy. Are we clear?”

She looks away, catches Dustin’s worried eyes. He’s huddled up against Steve—her idiot Steve Harrington, who Nancy never once, not in a million years, pegged as the type of guy who’d comfort a kid, but there he is, one hand on Dustin’s shoulder, shooting her this look that says, clear as day, *Don’t you dare blow this up, Nancy. Don’t you dare scare them again.*

Nancy forces herself to meet Hopper’s eyes. “Fine.”

He's not done with her yet. "I told you to lie down."

Nancy glances around. No way is she sharing with Dustin and Steve. Lucas and don't-call-me-Maxine have nabbed the other twin mattress. No room left on the couch; Jonathan and Will are both dead to the world, anyway.

Mike's dark head pops up like a gopher's. "You can come sleep with us."

On the mattress he's sharing with two other people. One of whom is Hopper.

"El's already asleep," her brother says. "You got to be quiet."

Nancy bites her lip. "No, Mike."

"It's okay. We can make enough room." Mike turns to stare at Hopper. "Can't we."

Hopper gives the twin mattress a dubious once-over, then grunts. Nancy's starting to suspect that the man's built an entire language out of nothing but grunts and grumbles. "Well, guess I asked for it," he finally says.

So. With the appropriate amounts of shifting and swearing, Nancy ends up sharing a mattress with her brother, one of his best friends, and the town police chief. Inches to the right, her ex-boyfriend passes extra pillows to two other rugrats and warns a third that if he keeps hogging the covers "I am drop-kicking you into that wall, swear to God." Inches to the left, her not-quite boyfriend wakes enough to swat his brother's feet out of his face. It's the weirdest excuse for a sleepover she's ever been involved in.

And no. It doesn't stop her thinking about what could still be roaming in the dark outside the cardboard. Nothing can. All the same, Nancy is surrounded. Smashed in, stifled, breathing in the smell of everyone else. Safety in numbers, right?

At least she isn't alone.

"I love you," she whispers, early in the dark of the morning. They're the only two who haven't dropped off to sleep.

"Aw, Nancy," Mike whispers back, disgusted.

"I know," she says. "But I do. Really."

Wind scrapes against the cardboard. They both shiver.

"Nancy?" her brother asks. Over his shoulder she can see that Mike's hand is still tangled with El's.

"What?"

"This feels..." he stops, and when Mike starts again it's quieter than the wind, quieter than El's breathing.

"It feels like we're a family."

Nancy bites back a giggle. What, so Hopper's the dad and Joyce is the mom and the rest of them are all brothers and sisters? Like they'd be so lucky.

Hopper stirs. Nancy clams up, sure he's about to crack an eyelid and unleash some Biblical-level wrath on them. Instead, the man—who's already balanced on the very edge of the mattress—throws out an arm to cover El, and by extension, Mike and Nancy. His fingers brush her shoulder.

Weirdly, Nancy doesn't jerk away. Weirder still, she doesn't want to. For the first time in hours, the sound of the wind banging at the cardboard doesn't rattle her. She reaches down to squeeze her brother's free hand.

You know what? It sort of does.

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Morning means more phone calls, explanations, and promises to get home as soon as they've finished breakfast. Breakfast means Eggo waffles already defrosting on the counter, thanks to Dustin's demodog corpse. It means the kids squirting syrup all over their

scrambled eggs because Mike has them convinced it's the *only* way to eat scrambled eggs. It means Jonathan sitting next to Nancy and squeezing her hand under the table; Steve sitting across from her and flicking Max's long red hair out of her syrup. It means Joyce smiling, Hopper sipping coffee, El clambering over Hopper's lap to grab one of his waffles.

It means that probably, sort of, they've got a decent shot at this. They're all going back to being okay.

(Means that Nancy ignores the grief welling behind Joyce's eyes, the anxiety still stewing in her own gut, and the way Steve avoids talking to her by starting another argument with Dustin about the demodog.)

For this half hour, they're something close to a family.

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Things never went back to normal. They never will.

Maybe...

When they all tried so hard; some of them about broke themselves trying...

(But none of them are normal, are they?)

Maybe they never should.

Author's Note:

Title is, of course, from "Every Breath You Take" by The Police. In case you can't tell, season 2 stole my heart. But especially Steve and Dustin. Oh lordy, guys. Those two give me life.

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